

Unless the God Wishes: A Religious Reassessment of Homer's Apologoi

This paper argues that Odysseus' understanding of the gods in the Apologoi transforms from one of arrogant presumptuousness to one of broken stupefaction in the course of the Apologoi's episodes. While Odysseus does not seem to outrightly lie to King Alcinous, he does attribute words and feelings to gods which he fabricates for the sake of telling a more pleasant story.

Books Nine through Twelve of Homer's *Odyssey*, the Apologoi, have been studied using different approaches such as narratology and characterization, with consideration for Odysseus' audiences, internal and external. Many scholars have argued to what extent Odysseus' character changes through the Apologoi, though these debates are often confined to the character's heroism (Segal 1994). Others have observed that there is very little reference to divine activity in the Apologoi, even if the gods are mentioned often (Kearns 2006).

In the first section, I will discuss what Odysseus' perceptions of the gods are like toward the beginning of Book Nine before the Cyclopeia turns violent (Od. 9.105-286). I propose that Odysseus throws weighty, religious language with an eye towards manipulation *and* does actually believe his platitudes to a certain extent which is often demonstrated in the mixing of the "narrating" and "experiencing-I" as when Odysseus tells Polyphemus that Zeus arranged his arrival (Od. 9.262), or when he demands Polyphemus "revere the gods" (Od. 9.269). Formerly, Odysseus was living with a system of heroic values that worked well for war and conquest, but, as Rinon notes, the world of the *Odyssey* requires Odysseus to literally deny himself, identifying himself as *Outis*. As the episode ends, we find an Odysseus who is unwilling to let go of his former self. (Rinon 2007) Tied up with this refusal is also his refusal to let go of his cheap statements about what the gods want and what they have done e.g. (Od. 9.502-555). Divine *tisis* is directly called down upon Odysseus in this refusal, as Zeus, according to Friedrich, temporarily joins his wrath with the more ferocious and primal wrath of Poseidon (Friedrich 1991) (Od. 9.549-55).

In the second section of the paper, I skip to the end of the Apologoi, where a broken Odysseus is found laid low by suffering and confusion which is focalized by his prayer after he goes away from the companions on Thrinacia (Od. 12.333-8). While a narrative of divine *tisis* and retributive justice are not at all absent from the narrative, what becomes even more apparent for Odysseus is that the gods' plans for him defy expectation and rationalization. In order to more fully understand the Book Twelve prayer, it is necessary to look at the prayer Odysseus will make at the shore of Scheria in Book Five (Od. 5.445-50). The sharpest contrast generated in this section from the beginning of the Apologoi is the mode of supplication, as it is one of mystery, inexactitude, and from a place duly acknowledged need. This emphasis is most poignant in that Odysseus does not even presume to know the name of the god whom he is imploring.

Furthermore, Odysseus has conceived of the Olympians in such a way in Book Twelve that they would pour out a sleep of calamity upon him at the very moment he entrusted himself fully to their care. As if symbolizing his spiritual death to self, he sleeps dead to *mētis*, manipulation, and agency.

In conclusion, my argument develops by giving a brief survey of the intermediate episodes of the Apologoi, each of which contains a development in Odysseus' understanding of the gods. For instance, Circe's interventions and directions in Books Ten through Twelve, being a goddess herself, are indispensable for understanding Odysseus' theological changes. Alongside Circe, Aeolus, the epiphany of Hermes, Scylla, and the Sirens are necessary for a more complete response.

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